



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Persons Interested in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay 2010 Land Conservation Goal
FROM: Tom Smith, DCR Natural Heritage Director
DATE: November 16, 2007
RE: Correction in Number of Acres Protected in Bay Watershed

As part of the Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under the Sound Land Use Goal committed to five Land Conservation strategies, including: "Strengthen programs for land acquisition and preservation within each state that are supported by funding and target the most valued lands for protection. Permanently preserve from development 20 percent of the land area in the watershed by 2010." While the states of New York, Delaware, and West Virginia contain lands in the watershed, those three states were not signatories to the Agreement and therefore were not part of the baywide goal.

Virginia has 13,831,890 acres in the bay watershed. Applying the 20% calculation to Virginia's portion of the watershed resulted in 2,766,378 acres for a Virginia target. Back in 2000, staff at the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) were requested to quickly develop their best estimate of the total number of lands already permanently protected in Virginia's portion of the bay watershed. Using the data available at that time, the existing watershed protected lands total for 2000 was determined to be 2,216,236 acres. This became the baseline calculation.

Since then, DCR has worked hard to build one of the best land conservation targeting set of map tools in the nation. As part of this effort, we just completed a quality control process to determine detailed protected land totals for each locality in Virginia. During this work, DCR staff discovered a significant error in the 2000 baseline calculation. We have just verified this error and wanted to communicate it to you as soon as possible.

In 2000, the U.S. Forest Service had supplied a GIS shapefile for the George Washington National Forest that included land in West Virginia. The shapefile presented obscured this significant fact. As a result, 116,511 acres were counted as protected in Virginia, when these lands were in fact in West Virginia. Other more minor updates to the original 2000 baseline plus the GWNF changes result in a total 2000 baseline correction of minus 120,918 acres. We will be incorporating this information into all future reports that reference Virginia land conservation progress toward the bay goal. Consequently, as of June 30, 2007 Virginia has protected 2,406,106 acres and has 359,931 acres to go on the bay goal.

The error occurred prior to 2006 when Governor Kaine established his goal of protecting an additional 400,000 acres by the close of 2010. Therefore, it does not effect the reporting of the Governor's goal. As of June thirty, 240,615 acres remain to be protected toward the 400,000 acre goal.

We fully understand the significant implications of this finding, and deeply regret that we only just discovered this error that was made in 2000.